

Creating a Story for a Philatelic Exhibit

Whatever I tell you, believe that I could change my mind. Whenever you hear something from another, believe there is something they forgot to mention. Yes, that's correct. There is no single best answer for creating a story to support a philatelic exhibit. And it is work. And it becomes habit forming, and you will wonder why you ever thought there was nothing to do beyond filling empty spaces on album pages. Now let me say this, about that...

When you are ready to construct a philatelic exhibit, deciding what your story (story-line) is, must be decided before proceeding to the next step – *Designing Pages for an Exhibit*. The *story* is the *purpose* of your exhibit. Too many exhibitors try to design first, then, create the story to support the design. That gives room for incomplete data and stories that are out of sequence, hard to follow, or confusing to the exhibitor's audience.

Material mounted in an exhibit, whether randomly scattered across the pages, or aesthetically arranged must contain a cogent story, or they are not exhibits. Pages without a story are more closely related to stamp albums or collections. They follow the same general outline presented in stamp catalogues, which is sequential from first issue to last, and dry and boring. Albums and catalogues are for reference, an archive of facts. Exhibits are for stimulating new learning, new discovery!

Let's choose a subject and see how it might be used in our Club Exhibiting Program. I am like many stamp collectors. I want just about everything related to philately, but cannot afford to buy it all. So, I refine my interests into smaller groups I like most, make sure I have avenues for purchasing that material, and check the bank balance so I can afford to purchase. Think of this like the joke, "How do you eat an elephant? [Answer: One bite at a time]. The first bite you take when developing the story is it's inner core. When we apply the same thought process to developing a story, we should remember the term: Narrow the Scope.

Recently, I acquired a large assortment of ships and trains on stamps. These are popular thematic interests. I sorted through the material and decided I preferred ships with sails printed before 1950. After some conversation with club members and dealers, I decided ships would be a good area for developing a respectable collection, a portion of which would become an exhibit. Attempting to find and purchase all of the stamps in this area would not be practical, not even if I had deep pockets. Here is one plan for narrowing scope:

- Stamp design must show vessels with sails,
- printed (engraved print process) before 1950,
- used for exploration and defense,
- definitive stamps issued in sets or as singles,
- and from one British Empire colony – Jamaica?

If we were preparing for an organized philatelic exhibit, like those supported by APS or AAPE at WSP shows, it might be necessary to refine the scope a bit further. This depends on many other factors, and rules which are not necessary for Club Exhibiting. The bulleted list above is simply an outline. Treat the outline like a budget. Refine it as you continue to acquire material. Make your material fit the story! A

smart person once said, “The art of good writing is rewriting.” And so it is with writing the story for your exhibit, regardless if you use words, pictures, or both.

As you can see, a mental vision about the material for our sample exhibit was formed while creating the outline. This was probably an interest sparked by previous research; something that attracted my attention, that I found enjoyable, and that I want to share. I want to show-and-tell others about my knowledge to see if they will enjoy it too. This is the fundamental purpose behind a philatelic exhibit. What it costs, the awards, all that stuff, is fluff.

OK, what kind of material might I show to deliver my story? A few thoughts for consideration:

- one example of each print (unused mounted complete sets (airmails, dues, definitive issues, commemoratives? Pick one.))
- preproduction material (very expensive and sometimes hard to obtain)
- a sheet or multiples showing sheet imprints
- constant varieties and major plate flaws
- CDS cancels on at least one value from each of the primary post offices (dream on)
- a map showing sea routes taken by the ships from each nation represented on the stamps
- covers with all applicable rates for various services (including unique markings)

Now our story is really taking shape. By identifying the material to exhibit we are *refining* scope. With a little more polish, we might land on a story about print production, or sea routes to Jamaica. If you like print production, you might consider perforation variations, watermarks, transfer varieties, color differences, essays, proofs, and much, much more.

Oh, here’s something... what about Confederate blockade runners during the American Civil War. I believe the C.S.S. Alabama frequented those waters as part of its route to France for repairs and war supplies.

If you change your theme, conduct more research to determine if there is enough material available and affordable to support the new idea. Changing your mind is part of the fun, not a frustration. But keep it simple. Most who enjoy viewing exhibits spend only a few minutes studying your work (if you are lucky) before visiting another exhibit. So where can I get more ideas? If you are not a member of APS, become one. The APRL (the APS library) is fantastic. For a small fee you can ask them to photocopy information to send to you, or send you books on loan. Don’t know what to ask for? Not a problem. The librarians will help you discover useful material while you talk to them on the telephone. Here are some out-of-print booklets you may want to check out and read, or have copies made for your library:

- Philatelic Exhibiting, by Roy A. Dehn [Stanley Gibbons]
- How to Arrange and Write-up a Stamp Collection, by Stanley Phillips [Stanley Gibbons]

These booklets were written before personal computers were invented. They still offer useful ideas for exhibitors; those who prepare exhibits manually and those who do it electronically.

You need to develop a “hook” to lure... then snag your audience while impressing them by delivering meaningful knowledge. In saying that, let’s look at the next topic, the ultimate “hook,” page design.